

**Testimony Regarding H.B. No 5040: An Act Concerning The Governor's Budget
Adjustments Recommendations for Human Services**

Jonathan Gonzalez-Cruz
Human Services Committee
March 1st, 2022

Dear Dear Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding H.B. No 5040: An Act Concerning The Governor's Budget Adjustments Recommendations for Human Services. My name is Jonathan Gonzalez-Cruz and I live in Wallingford, Connecticut. I serve as a Health Care Organizer for Connecticut Citizen Action Group, a statewide membership-based organization dedicated to actively engaging the residents of CT to alter the relations of power in order to build a more just society.

The COVID pandemic has illustrated the importance of building an equitable health care system; where neither income, race or immigration status affects one's ability to access quality, affordable health coverage. Today's commodified health care system, doubled with this nation's historically racist systems, has placed barriers for people of lower income and people of color to not only attain coverage, but also seek medical attention or care when necessary. In turn, I implore the Human Services Committee to address the ongoing systematic issues affecting countless working families and individuals across our home state. Below are data-driven, community minded recommendations for how to address said issues:

1.) Urgent Need for Community Health Worker (CHW) Support

- As our health insurance systems grow more complex and tens of thousands of residents are likely to become ineligible for HUSKY when the federal declaration of a public health emergency ends, there is an **urgent need for trusted, community-based support to ensure people can enroll in AND use health insurance**. Additionally, as people of color are disproportionately affected by gaps in health insurance coverage and face uneven access to health care services, leaning on community health workers for targeted outreach will help residents with the least access to care receive the services and support they need.

2.) Increase access to HUSKY to include all income-eligible immigrants regardless of their status:

- Undocumented immigrants are excluded from subsidized health plans on the exchange, HUSKY medicaid and private insurance can deny an applicant without a social security. Consequently, while the state boasts a 5% uninsured rate, **within the undocumented community the uninsured rate is ten-fold at 52%. As a result, 1 in 3 uninsured individuals in the state are undocumented.** In turn, people are not able to receive care to treat preventable issues that are then prolonged and worsen, causing community members to only receive care in an emergency room. By expanding HUSKY regardless of immigration status, the state will get closer to 100% insured rate and save money long term by investing more in primary care.

3.) Medicaid Dental Rates & Increasing Access

- Increasing access to dental treatments is an ongoing issue that must be addressed. In Connecticut, **2 out of 3 adults on HUSKY do not access dental care, many because they cannot find a dentist. Presently, appointments are difficult to find and there is only 1 endodontist in the state accepting HUSKY enrollees.** Moreover, the average wait time for a root canal is 4 months. That is too long to live in pain and is usually too long for a root canal to be successful. According to public health dentists, 8 out of 10 adults on HUSKY who need a root canal end up getting an extraction because they cannot find a specialist to treat them. All in all, it's evident the state must work to close the gap for folks unable to receive dental care.

4.) 175% FPL is not 200% FPL

- As Connecticut's minimum wage increases, it is vital to address benefit cliff victims' needs who will make a little too much to be eligible for Medicaid and struggle to find affordable coverage elsewhere. **Currently, minimum wage does not cover the cost of health insurance even with subsidies and cost-sharing on Access Health CT. Even with cost-sharing and premium subsidies, the cost of health insurance is unaffordable for some people in Connecticut.** Additionally, people of color are far more likely to go without insurance than the state average. This injustice is rooted in discrimination in employment, education, and housing. The state must ensure as wages rise, people do not lose access to affordable, quality health coverage.

In summary, the state must continue working on creating an equitable health care system where everyone has coverage and access to quality health care. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Social Services.

Sincerely,
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Health Care Organizer
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